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ABSTRACT

The goals of an intervention study of formal reading instruction were to encourage teachers to incorporate more direct teaching of comprehension, to maintain a more equitable balance between time devoted to word recognition instruction and time devoted to comprehension instruction, to promote independent level reading, and to minimize the amount of time used for noninstructional activities. Subjects, nine elementary school classroom teachers of grades 2, 3, and 4, were monitored both before and after intervention to determine the type and amount of comprehension instruction they provided; the time they spent on word recognition activities, other reading activities, and noninstructional activities; and the number of students in their classes who were reading at their independent level. After the first observation, an intervention team explained the goals of the study to the subjects, observed them teaching, and helped them develop teaching strategies. Post intervention results showed improvement in all areas measured. The research was conducted within a supervision model founded on the belief that the supervision process must be based on a "no threat" relationship between supervisor and teacher, a relationship of colleagues. The researchers followed seven of the model's eight premises on teacher behavior and the supervision process, concluding that the time and effort that were required to achieve the colleague relationship may make establishing such a relationship difficult under more typical circumstances. (JL)

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IMPROVING COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

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Recent research in reading comprehension instruction has generated increasing concerns about the quantity and quality of such instruction in elementary classrooms. In a widely quoted observational study, Durkin (1979) reported the following results: 1. practically no comprehension instruction was done in classrooms; 2. the time which was devoted to comprehension consisted predominately of comprehension assessment; 3. teachers neglected comprehension teaching because they were too busy teaching phonics, structural analysis, and word meaning skills, and; 4. teachers were primarily assignment givers and checkers.

Hodges (1980) questioned both Durkin's definition of comprehension and the way in which she operationalized it in her scheme for categorizing teaching behavior. However, in a follow-up study, Kurth and Greenlaw (1981) found evidence of many of the same instructional patterns reported by Durkin, and their results substantiated the major findings of Durkin's study. Specifically, Kurth and Greenlaw found that 1. teachers spend most of their reading instruction time in teaching phonics and word recognition skills; 2. when comprehension was taught, it was generally taught on a one-to-one basis rather than as part of directed instruction; 3. an average of 19 per cent of the instructional time was spent in non-instructional activities; and 4. although teachers grouped for reading instruction, these groupings were not used to individualize instruction to meet pupils' needs.

However, simply reporting these existing practices appears to be little more than "cursing the darkness" if no attempts are made to modify teachers' instructional practices. Thus, the general purpose of this study was to develop model procedures for working with inservice elementary teachers to modify instructional practices during reading instruction. A model of intervention developed by Boyan and Copeland (1968) was adapted for use in this study. After reviewing data from the previous studies which had examined teaching practices during formal reading instruction, the researchers decided that the specific goals of this study would be to encourage teachers 1. to incorporate more direct teaching of comprehension during formal reading instruction; 2. to maintain a more equitable balance between the instructional time devoted to word recognition instruction and time devoted to comprehension instruction; 3. to promote independent level reading during formal reading instruction; and 4. to minimize the amount of instructional time used for non-instructional or transitional activities.

The subjects for this study were nine, certified elementary classroom teachers, three each from second, third, and fourth grade classrooms in a suburban elementary school in North Texas with a student population of 630 pupils. The researchers were invited by the principal of the school to conduct the study in his building. The nine primary teachers all volunteered to become part of the study; however, the principal's interest in the study was undoubtedly a factor in the teachers' decisions to volunteer.

At the onset of the study, observers monitored the formal reading instruction in each of the nine classrooms during the fourth, fifth and sixth weeks of the fall semester. The times for the formal reading instruction were altered in order that three observers could observe all nine classrooms. The observers were three graduate students in reading who had been part of the 1981 comprehension project and were trained in the observation procedures used in that study. These observers monitored and recorded the following: 1. the type of comprehension instruction done by each teacher; 2. the amount of comprehension instruction of each type done by each teacher; 3. the amount of time spent in word recognition activities; 4. the amount of time spent in other reading activities; 5. the amount of time spent in non-instructional or transitional activities; and 6. the number of students reading on their independent level during formal reading instruction. An identical summary observation was done during the 33rd, 34th, and 35th weeks of the school year by the same observers.

The intervention team was composed of three other graduate students in reading and a college professor of reading education. The major goals of the project were developed by the researchers and presented to the nine teacher subjects. The researchers met with the teachers and discussed the research which had led to the formulation of specific project objectives. These beginning sessions with individuals and with groups of teachers were used to stress the idea that the intervention team was there to assist teachers rather than act in an evaluative role.

The intervention team spent three mornings each week for two semesters working with the nine volunteer teachers participating in the study. The mornings were spent either in observing reading instruction done by the subjects or in giving demonstration lessons. Three times each week, either after the school day or during individual teachers' planning sessions, the researchers met with individual teachers to discuss various teaching strategies. Most of this time was used to develop lesson plans for comprehension.

One of the findings of the previous study (Kurth and Greenlaw 1981) was that a distinct difference could be seen in the approach used by teachers when teaching comprehension skills as compared to the approach used by teachers when teaching word recognition skills. In most instances when a teacher was focusing on a word recognition skill, a period of direct instruction was used during which time the teacher discussed strategies for using the skill being taught. Then an assignment was given, and the children proceeded to apply the skill just taught. However, during comprehension instruction, teachers rarely used direct instruction. Instead, they simply gave a comprehension assignment and then assisted individual children if they had difficulty answering certain comprehension questions. Thus, most of the instruction in comprehension was done on a teacher to individual student basis in contrast to word recognition instruction which was done on a group basis. This finding that teachers use very little direct instruction in comprehension teaching is substantially the same finding as Durkin reported and classified as "mentioning". When faced with teaching

comprehension tasks, teachers simply "mentioned" the task with a cursory overview and then asked children to do the task. This same pattern was found in the teaching of the nine subjects in the present study. The initial observations showed that the average amount of formal reading instruction time devoted to direct teaching of comprehension skills was 2 per cent for second grade teachers, 12 per cent for third grade teachers and 9 per cent for fourth grade teachers. Therefore, the project team encouraged teachers to increase the amount of time they spent in the direct teaching of comprehension skills. In order to encourage this type of teaching, it became necessary for project researchers to write lesson plans based on specific comprehension skills and then to present them as demonstration lessons in the various classrooms. The criteria for these lessons included the following: 1. a measurable comprehension objective; 2. a period of at least four minutes of direct instruction in comprehension strategies; and 3. the application and assessment of the comprehension skill being taught.

While working with the teachers on lesson planning, project researchers found that teachers had difficulty formulating specific objectives for comprehension lessons. They often stated their objectives in vague generalities such as "read to understand the story" or "read to answer the questions in Rainbows". This was in direct contrast to their objectives for word recognition lessons which were very specific. This seemed to substantiate what Lanier and Floden (1978) reported when they claimed "teachers need help in having knowledge translated into articulate sets of

curricula." Once the objective for teaching was clarified, teachers were able to begin developing excellent plans. Another area of emphasis in the lesson planning sessions was the encouragement given to teachers to develop longer periods of direct instruction in comprehension. As teachers became more adept in developing plans, the length of the periods of direct instruction became longer. The materials for these comprehension lessons were taken from the basal reading materials and supplementary materials which were available in the school building. Over a period of several weeks, the teachers and researchers developed and shared a collection of plans for teaching specific comprehension skills. However, as they became more proficient in lesson planning, the project teachers no longer relied as heavily on the plan library; rather they seemed to gain confidence in their ability to write plans which met the needs of their own classrooms. Thus, the process of learning to write plans for comprehension teaching rather than the product (the plan itself) became the most valuable part of the project experience.

The post intervention observation results showed that the average amount of formal reading instruction time devoted to the direct teaching of comprehension was 36 per cent for the second grade teachers, 39 per cent for the third grade teachers and 44 per cent for the fourth grade teachers. The results of the pre intervention and the post intervention observations of direct instruction are compared in Table 1 below.

- - - Insert Table 1 here - - -

Another objective for the study was to help teachers achieve a more equitable balance between instructional time devoted to word recognition instruction and instructional time devoted to comprehension instruction. The pre intervention observers found that the second grade teachers spent an average of 38 per cent of the formal reading instruction time teaching word recognition skills and 26 per cent of the formal reading instruction time teaching comprehension skills. The third grade teachers spent an average of 31 per cent of the formal reading time teaching word recognition skills and 24 per cent of the time teaching comprehension skills. The fourth grade teachers spent 34 per cent of the formal reading instruction time teaching word recognition skills and 29 per cent of the formal reading instruction time teaching comprehension skills. It is also important to note that the comprehension skill teaching was generally done on a teacher to individual child basis whereas the word recognition instruction was generally done on a group basis. This would tend to inflate the comprehension teaching time.

Because the faculty of this particular elementary school felt very strongly that instruction in word recognition skills, especially phonics instruction, was a very important element in the teaching of reading, the intervention team never suggested that the percentage of time devoted to word recognition instruction be decreased. Rather, the researchers continued to stress the idea that comprehension instruction is central to an excellent reading program. As the intervention team continued to focus

on comprehension and as teachers gained more confidence in their ability to teach comprehension tasks, they began to devote more time to teaching comprehension skills. They also expressed feelings of satisfaction with their ability to teach comprehension. The post intervention observation results showed that the second grade teachers spent an average of 31 per cent of the formal reading instruction time teaching word recognition skills and 36 per cent of the formal reading instruction time teaching comprehension skills. The third grade teachers spent an average of 24 per cent of the formal reading instruction time teaching word recognition skills and 38 per cent of the formal reading time teaching comprehension skills. The fourth grade teachers spent 18 per cent of the formal reading instruction time teaching word recognition skills and 52 per cent of the formal reading instruction time teaching comprehension skills. The pre intervention and post intervention observation results are compared in Table 2 below.

- - - Insert Table 2 here - - -

The post intervention results show that teachers did spend more time teaching comprehension skills than word recognition skills. A possible reason for this change in teacher behavior was stated by Duffy (1982): "Time on task is affected by what teachers feel they can teach successfully and that teachers will spend more time on tasks that they feel comfortable and successful in teaching."

A third objective of the study was to increase the amount of independent reading done by children in the reading classes. Data from the previous study (Kurth and Greenlaw, 1981) had shown that even though all teachers observed had used three groups for teaching reading, little or no modification of instruction either in content or methodology was done for any of the groups. Because teachers often used exactly the same materials for students in each group, students were often attempting to read material that was either too difficult or too easy for them. The pre intervention observation results showed that, on an average, only 35 per cent of the second grade students were reading on their independent level each day, an average of 46 per cent of the third grade students read on their independent level each day, and an average of 30 per cent of the fourth grade students read on their independent level each day.

By encouraging teachers to have children read on their independent levels each day, it was hoped that teachers would learn to modify the formal reading instruction so that it would meet the needs of individual children. The researchers helped teachers ascertain reading levels for individual students by using abbreviated informal reading inventories and by providing examples of short, carefully graded materials on many levels. These materials were taken from the basal readers, supplementary basal readers, and from trade books available in the school. At first, the teachers felt very overwhelmed by this project task, but with encouragement from the project staff, they realized that providing independent

level reading passages was not as difficult or time consuming as they had first imagined it would be. The teachers also enlisted the students' help in monitoring their reading success, and students became adept at judging materials which were suitable for them. The post intervention observation results showed that an average of 82 per cent of the second grade students, 96 per cent of the third grade students, and 84 per cent of the fourth grade students read on their independent level each day during formal reading instruction. The pre intervention and post intervention observation results are compared in Table 3 below.

- - - Insert Table 3 here - - -

The final objective of the study, to encourage teachers to minimize the amount of instructional time used for non-instructional or transitional activities, resulted from the previous finding (Kurth and Greenlaw, 1981) that approximately 20 per cent of the total formal reading instruction time was spent on transitional or non-instructional activities. The pre intervention observation results showed that the average per cent of formal reading instructional time devoted to transitional or non-instructional activities was 19 per cent for second grade, 21 per cent for third grade, and 15 per cent for third grade. In this observation category, unlike any of the other categories, there was a great deal of variance from teacher to teacher. For example, one second grade teacher devoted a total of 38 per cent of the reading instruction time to transitional or non-instructional activities, while the other two second

grade teachers spent 6 per cent and 13 per cent of the instructional time in non-instructional activities. Because of the wide variance from teacher to teacher, the researchers emphasized management skills only in those classrooms where management of reading instruction appeared to be a serious problem. Again demonstration lessons were given by the project researchers, and specific management skills were discussed with teachers during the planning periods. The results of the post intervention observation showed almost as great a variance from teacher to teacher in this category as the pre intervention observation results had shown. However, improvement was dramatic for the two teachers who had had the highest per cent of reading instruction time devoted to non-instructional activities on the pre intervention observation. The post intervention observation results showed that the average per cent of formal reading instruction time devoted to transitional and non-instructional activities was 14 per cent for second grade, 16 per cent for third grade, and 12 per cent for fourth grade. The pre intervention and post intervention observation results are compared in Table 4 below.

- - - Insert Table 4 here - - -

A comparison of the pre and post intervention observation results showed improvement in all of the areas measured. Thus, the researchers concluded that, with a great effort on the part of an intervention team, it is possible to increase positive practices in reading.

In keeping with the theme of the forum, the last section of this paper will deal specifically with the strategies used in this study's efforts to move research findings into classroom practice. The basis for the intervention strategies, the Boyan and Copeland (1968) supervision model, gives guidelines for bringing about change using clinical supervision techniques. The model, which has been used as a basis for training supervisors to work with secondary teachers in content area reading instruction (Laine, 1982), is founded on the belief that the supervision process must be based on a colleagial supervisor-teacher relationship. The researchers in this study acted as supervisors in the sense that they observed teachers, gave feedback about performance, and worked to help teachers move toward self-improvement. The eight central premises of the model, the ways the premises were applied in this study, and instances where the premises were violated will be presented. The value of a staff development model predicated on the idea of colleagueship will be discussed as well as some of the difficulties facing those who propose such a model in the real school situtation. Also experiences in this study will be used to make some generalizations and suggestions about positive future directions in techniques to change teacher behavior.

The first premise of the supervision model assumes that many of the problems teachers encounter in the classroom can be resolved if the teacher can change his or her behavior in positive ways. Students' abilities, home environments, and attitudes, as

well as factors such as school climate and administrative decisions, have a great influence on the classroom situation and are beyond the control of the teacher. Because of these factors, teachers often do not recognize the importance of their own behaviors on student achievement. This model assumes that many difficulties in teaching reading can be overcome by a change in teaching behavior.

The second premise of the model was the only one violated in this study. Boyan and Copeland (1968), as well as other well-known theorists in the fields of supervision and staff development (Erickson, 1977, 1982 and Harris, 1975), note that changes in behavior must come from within; that is, an exploration of the perceived needs of the participants must be a beginning step in any staff development effort. Alfonso and Goldsberry (1982) point out that too often schools adopt a participative approach in the pursuit of predetermined objectives regardless of the appropriateness or importance of these targets as perceived by the teachers. This research effort was characterized by an initial lack of attention to teachers' perceived needs. Objectives related to increased time in comprehension instruction, grouping practices, and instructional time were devised by the researchers based on their observations, independent of any suggestions by the teachers. However, the teachers who participated in the program did so voluntarily, and the researchers met with them to discuss the research which had led to the formulation of specific project objectives. The teachers seemed to accept the observations presented

as valid information and, during their involvement in the project, became very enthusiastic about the new skills they were learning. The failure to include teachers in the initial determining of objectives may have been necessary because of the research situation but is a flaw in efforts to implement research findings in classrooms. Perhaps researchers are missing a great pool of ideas concerning directions for research. There may be many significant questions being ignored because those who conceptualize them do not have the training or inclination to do research.

The third premise is that teachers are often unaware of many teaching and learning behaviors that occur in their classrooms. The reasons for this lack of awareness are many, including the following: too much happens too rapidly in the classroom, teachers are seldom equipped with the specific skills necessary for labeling classroom behavior, and systematic observation is difficult to observe while teaching. Teachers in this study were often unaware of the time spent on different aspects of instruction. They stated that the amounts of time spent on word recognition and comprehension instruction were approximately the same. The initial observations in this study revealed that the difference in amounts of time spent on these two types of instruction was very great. The teacher who was having great difficulty with classroom management knew she had problems in this area but was not able to articulate the reasons for the difficulties. She seemed unaware that time spent on non-productive, non-instructional tasks was contributing to the problems in the classroom.

Boylan and Copeland (1968) propose that increased awareness of teaching and learning behaviors in the classroom can help teachers recognize needed changes. Much inappropriate teaching occurs because teachers are unaware of their behavior. When given specific information, teachers use that information to change their behaviors and improve instruction. In this study, some of the changes were implemented simply because of the teacher's increased awareness. For instance, the researchers spent little time with most of the teachers in working on strategies to minimize the amount of non-productive time in the classroom. Efforts were directed toward the teacher with the most difficulty with management. However, all teachers, except the one who was already very proficient in her use of time, improved somewhat in this aspect.

The fifth premise of the model is that existing teaching and learning behaviors can be revealed to the teacher through systematic observation. To alter teaching behavior, the teacher must be able to see what is taking place in the classroom. Observation does not automatically improve instruction. In fact, as has been noted elsewhere, some of the aspects of teacher improvement required almost overwhelming effort on the part of researchers and teachers; however, the observations by the researchers and their feedback proved to be a valuable method for increasing the teachers' awareness and for changing behaviors. Garman (1982) notes that any supervision or staff development program can be helped by classroom observation when the observation is specific and revolves around behavior that is of interest to the teacher.

Efforts were made in this study to structure all classroom observations around specific objectives and to answer questions posed by teachers about their own behaviors.

The sixth premise of the model provides that, since it is difficult for the teacher to apply systematic observation techniques while teaching, a trained observer is needed. The researchers in this study acted as supervisors in a clinical supervision situation. The researchers were trained in their observations of teachers' use of time, grouping strategies, and techniques for teaching comprehension. No effort was made to include the teachers as observers of each other. Some type of peer supervision would perhaps have been helpful and offers a promising direction in changing teacher behaviors.

In the seventh premise of the model, it is proposed that the observer must present the observation results to the teacher in a way that will allow the teacher to accept them as valid, to internalize them, and to use them to identify needed instructional changes. The usual purpose for observation is an evaluative one. Teachers have difficulty, because of the threatening aspects of such observations, in accepting and internalizing the results. Efforts were made in this study to develop a colleagial relationship between the researchers and the teachers. The benefits of colleagueship have been well established in the literature on supervision (Alfonso & Goldsberry, 1982; Cogan, 1972; McNeil, 1982). Researchers made every effort to act in a colleagial role.

The eighth premise states that the teacher will accept and internalize observation results best when there is a "no threat" relationship between the teacher and the supervisor. The researchers in this study noted the difficulty of achieving such a relationship even though they stressed from the beginning that they were not in any way in an evaluative role. The researchers had to work closely with the teachers in the classrooms and experience their problems to be accepted by the teachers in a true give-and-take manner. There is a critical difference between the evaluative, administrative role and the supervising, colleagial role in improving instruction. Even in the non-threatening atmosphere of the research situation, teachers were, at first, fearful. Differentiating supervision to improve instruction from evaluation presents a great challenge to those who wish to move research findings into practice. The principal who is an effective instructional leader might be a source of study. How do these successful principals manage to separate helping and evaluation functions? A study of the supervisory behaviors of effective principals might be beneficial in finding ways to move research findings into practice.

In summary, the researchers in this study were able to increase positive practices in several important areas: comprehension instruction, instructional time, and differentiated instruction for different groups of students. However, these changes were made only with an extreme outlay of time and energy on the part of both teachers and researchers. The program described in this paper involved many after-school sessions, and researchers worked diligently in locating materials and writing detailed lesson plans.

The researchers gained insights into teachers' real problems associated with the lack of time to do the tasks considered sound educational practice and good reading comprehension instruction. The development of the colleagial relationship was time-consuming. The researchers did not, at first, meet a completely open, willing group even though participation in the program was voluntary and the project had the active support of the principal. Researchers had to work to prove themselves as true colleagues of the teachers before work in actually changing behaviors could begin. Continous monitoring of teaching behaviors on a day-to-day basis was necessary for continued improvement. In short, the task of improving comprehension instruction can be done, but it calls for continuous, almost Herculean efforts.

One of the real issues in the research to practice issue concerns who will provide the efforts necessary to implement changes in instructional practice. Reading specialists or supervisors often are most responsible for implementing instructional change in reading. Some of the difficulties associated with this work are apparent from this study. However, in this study, the ratio of researchers to teachers was four to nine. In real school systems, the ratio may be one to three hundred or more. The benefits of clinical supervision: preobservation conferences, observations, postobservation conferences, and follow-up are limited to a few teachers. Another difficulty is indicated in a recent study of supervisory personnel by Sullivan (1982), in which she notes that the time supervisors actually spend in classrooms and with teachers is very limited. Sullivan found that most supervisory personnel

are actually engaged in information brokering tasks and seem to function more as nerve centers holding the bureaucracy of the system together. They seem to function to keep the system going as it is rather than in working toward instructional improvement. Sullivan found that only 14% of the contacts made by supervisors were with the teachers, and only 7% of the supervision time was spent in staff development and classroom observation. She suggests that since most supervisors spend their time in managerial tasks rather than in the improvement of instruction, titles and job descriptions should be changed and that concepts and descriptions of supervision tasks such as those by well-known authorities such as Harris (1975) are totally unrealistic in light of what really takes place in schools.

McNeil (1982) points out that peer supervision or review might offer help with this lack of time for instructional guidance. He notes that peer review would be helpful for the following reasons: the human resources of the schools would be more fully used; the idea that classroom teachers have much to contribute to instructional improvement would be recognized; and successful innovations would be more likely. He also points out that teachers trained in observations of others would be perhaps more systematic in their own application of instructional principles. He notes the supervisor's role in facilitating this process. Peer review procedures, like those of clinical supervision, would suffer from lack of time for teachers and supervisors in that someone must lead and facilitate such a process and teachers must use already

scarce time to participate. However, the colleagial relationships developed in this study were probably most responsible for the changes made in teachers' behaviors. The peer review system would seem to be a helpful application of colleagueship and would perhaps help schools to truly use the human resources available to them.

A follow-up study is being planned in order to measure whether the changes in teacher behavior will continue after the project ends. Because of the high level of teacher enthusiasm and involvement at the end of the project, the researchers feel that the changes in teaching behavior will be self-sustaining; however, no empirical evidence to substantiate this feeling is available at this time.

The underlying assumption of this study is that improving instructional practices in reading will improve pupils' reading ability. No empirical data was gathered in this study which would substantiate this assumption. The follow-up study will be designed to include control groups in order to show that changes in instructional practices do indeed improve children's reading ability.

TABLE 1

PER CENT OF COMPREHENSION TEACHING TIME DEVOTED TO TEACHING DIRECT COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

GRADE	PRE-INTERVENTION	POST-INTERVENTION
2ND	2	36
3RD	12	39
4TH	9	44

TABLE 2

PER CENT OF READING INSTRUCTION TIME DEVOTED TO WORD RECOGNITION AND COMPREHENSION

GRADE	PRE-INTERVENTION		POST-INTERVENTION	
	WORD REC.	COMPREHENSION	WORD REC.	COMPREHENSION
2ND	38	26	31	36
3RD	31	24	24	38
4TH	34	29	18	52

TABLE 3

PER CENT OF STUDENTS READING ON THEIR INDEPENDENT LEVEL

GRADE	PRE-INTERVENTION	POST-INTERVENTION
2ND	35 PER CENT	82 PER CENT
3RD	46 PER CENT	96 PER CENT
4TH	30 PER CENT	84 PER CENT

TABLE 4

PER CENT OF READING INSTRUCTION TIME DEVOTED TO NON-INSTRUCTIONAL AND TRANSITIONAL ACTIVITIES

GRADE	PRE-INTERVENTION	POST-INTERVENTION
2ND	19 PER CENT	14 PER CENT
3RD	21 PER CENT	16 PER CENT
4TH	15 PER CENT	12 PER CENT

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